

Chambers Robert William

A Young Man in a Hurry, and Other Short Stories



Robert Chambers

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TO

MARGERY

A YOUNG MAN IN A HURRY

“Soyez tranquilles, mesdames... Je suis un jeune homme pressé... Mais modeste.” – Labiche.

AT ten minutes before five in the evening the office doors of the Florida and Key West Railway Company flew open, and a young man emerged in a hurry.

Suit-case in one hand, umbrella in the other, he sped along the corridor to the elevator-shaft, arriving in time to catch a glimpse of the lighted roof of the cage sliding into depths below.

“Down!” he shouted; but the glimmering cage disappeared, descending until darkness enveloped it.

Then the young man jammed his hat on his head, seized the suit-case and umbrella, and galloped down the steps. The spiral marble staircase echoed his clattering flight; scrub-women heard him coming and fled; he leaped a pail of water and a mop; several old gentlemen flattened themselves against the wall to give him room; and a blond young person with pencils in her hair lisped “Gee!” as he whizzed past and plunged through the storm-doors, which swung back, closing behind him with a hollow thwack.

Outside in the darkness, gray with whirling snowflakes, he saw the wet lamps of cabs shining, and he darted along the line of hansoms and coupés in frantic search for his own.

“Oh, there you are!” he panted, flinging his suit-case up to a snow-covered driver. “Do your best now; we’re late!” And he leaped into the dark coupé, slammed the door, and sank back on the cushions, turning up the collar of his heavy overcoat.

There was a young lady in the farther corner of the cab, buried to her nose in a fur coat. At intervals she shivered and pressed a fluffy muff against her face. A glimmer from the sleet-smeared lamps fell across her knees.

Down-town flew the cab, swaying around icy corners, bumping over car-tracks, lurching, rattling, jouncing, while its silent occupants, huddled in separate corners, brooded moodily at their respective windows.

Snow blotted the glass, melting and running down; and over the watery panes yellow light from shop windows played fantastically, distorting vision.

Presently the young man pulled out his watch, fumbled for a match-box, struck a light, and groaned as he read the time.

At the sound of the match striking, the young lady turned her head. Then, as the bright flame illuminated the young man’s face, she sat bolt upright, dropping the muff to her lap with a cry of dismay.

He looked up at her. The match burned his fingers; he dropped it and hurriedly lighted another; and the flickering radiance brightened upon the face of a girl whom he had never before laid eyes on.

“Good heavens!” he said. “Where’s my sister?”

The young lady was startled, but resolute. “You have made a dreadful mistake,” she said; “you are in the wrong cab – ”

The match went out; there came a brief moment of darkness, then the cab turned a corner, and the ghostly light of electric lamps played over them in quivering succession.

“Will you please stop this cab?” she said, unsteadily. “You have mistaken my cab for yours. I was expecting my brother.”

Stunned, he made no movement to obey. A sudden thrill of fear passed through her.

“I must ask you to stop this cab,” she faltered.

The idiotic blankness of his expression changed to acute alarm.

“Stop this cab?” he cried. “Nothing on earth can induce me to stop this cab!”

“You must!” she insisted, controlling her voice. “You must stop it at once!”

“How can I?” he asked, excitedly; “I’m late now; I haven’t one second to spare!”

“Do you refuse to leave this cab?”

“I beg that you will compose yourself – ”

“Will you go?” she insisted.

A jounce sent them flying towards each other; they collided and recoiled, regarding one another in breathless indignation.

“This is simply hideous!” said the young lady, seizing the door-handle.

“Please don’t open that door!” he said. She tried to wrench it open; the handle stuck – or perhaps the strength had left her wrist. But it was not courage that failed, for she faced him, head held high, and —

“You coward!” she said.

Over his face a deep flush burned – and it was a good face, too – youthfully wilful, perhaps, with a firm, clean-cut chin and pleasant eyes.

“If I were a coward,” he said, “I’d stop this cab and get out. I never faced anything that frightened me half as much as you do!”

She looked him straight in the eyes, one hand twisting at the knob.

“Don’t you suppose that this mistake of mine is as humiliating and unwelcome to me as it is to you?” he said. “If you stop this cab it will ruin somebody’s life. Not mine – if it were my own life, I wouldn’t hesitate.”

Her hand, still clasping the silver knob, suddenly fell limp.

“You say that you are in a hurry?” she asked, with dry lips.

“A desperate hurry,” he replied.

“So am I,” she said, bitterly; “and, thanks to your stupidity, I must make the journey without my brother!”

There was a silence, then she turned towards him again:

“Where do you imagine this cab is going?”

“It’s going to Cortlandt Street – isn’t it?” Suddenly the recollection came to him that it was her cab, and that he had only told the driver to drive fast.

The color left his face as he pressed it to the sleet-shot window. Fitful flickers of light, snow, darkness – that was all he could see.

He turned a haggard countenance on her; he was at her mercy. But there was nothing vindictive in her.

“I also am going to Cortlandt Street; you need not be alarmed,” she said.

The color came back to his cheeks. “I suppose,” he ventured, “that you are trying to catch the Eden Limited, as I am.”

“Yes,” she said, coldly; “my brother – ” An expression of utter horror came into her face. “What on earth shall I do?” she cried; “my brother has my ticket and my purse!”

A lunge and a bounce sent them into momentary collision; a flare of light from a ferry lantern flashed in their faces; the cab stopped and a porter jerked open the door, crying:

“Eden Limited? You’d better hurry, lady. They’re closin’ the gates now.”

They sprang out into the storm, she refusing his guiding arm.

“What am I to do?” she said, desperately. “I *must* go on that train, and I haven’t a penny.”

“It’s all right; you’ll take my sister’s ticket,” he said, hurriedly paying the cabman.

A porter seized their two valises from the box and dashed towards the ferry-house; they followed to the turnstile, where the tickets were clipped.

“Now we’ve got to run!” he said. And off they sped, slipped through the closing gates, and ran for the gang-plank, where their porter stood making frantic signs for them to hasten. It was a close connection, but they made it, to the unfeigned amusement of the passengers on deck.

“Sa-ay!” drawled a ferry-hand, giving an extra twist to the wheel as the chains came clanking in, “she puts the bunch on the blink f’r a looker. Hey?”

“Plenty,” said his comrade; adding, after a moment’s weary deliberation, “She’s his tootsy-wootsy sure. B. and G.”

The two young people, who had caught the boat at the last second, stood together, muffled to the eyes, breathing rapidly. She was casting tragic glances astern, where, somewhere behind the smother of snow, New York city lay; he, certain at last of his train, stood beside her, attempting to collect his thoughts and arrange them in some sort of logical sequence.

But the harder he thought, the more illogical the entire episode appeared. How on earth had he ever come to enter a stranger’s cab and drive with a stranger half a mile before either discovered the situation? And what blind luck had sent the cab to the destination he also was bound for – and not a second to spare, either?

He looked at her furtively; she stood by the rail, her fur coat white with snow.

“The poor little thing!” he thought. And he said: “You need not worry about your section, you know. I have my sister’s ticket for you.”

After a moment’s gloomy retrospection he added: “When your brother arrives to knock my head off I’m going to let him do it.”

She made no comment.

“I don’t suppose,” he said, “that you ever could pardon what I have done.”

“No,” she said, “I never could.”

A brief interval passed, disturbed by the hooting of a siren.

“If you had stopped the cab when I asked you to – ” she began.

“If I had,” he said, “neither you nor I could have caught this train.”

“If you had not entered my cab, I should have been here at this moment with my brother,” she said. “Now I am here with you – penniless!”

He looked at her miserably, but she was relentless.

“It is the cold selfishness of the incident that shocks me,” she said; “it is not the blunder that offended me – ” She stopped short to give him a chance to defend himself; but he did not. “And now,” she added, “you have reduced me to the necessity of – borrowing money – ”

“Only a ticket,” he muttered.

But she was not appeased, and her silence was no solace to him.

After a few minutes he said: “It’s horribly cold out here; would you not care to go into the cabin?”

She shook her head, and her cheeks grew hot, for she had heard the observations of the ferrymen as the boat left. She would freeze in obscurity rather than face a lighted cabin full of people. She looked at the porter who was carrying their valises, and the dreadful idea seized her that he, too, thought them bride and groom.

Furious, half frightened, utterly wretched, she dared not even look at the man whose unheard-of stupidity had inflicted such humiliation upon her.

Tears were close to her eyes; she swallowed, set her head high, and turned her burning cheeks to the pelting snow.

Oh, he should rue it some day! When, how, where, she did not trouble to think; but he should rue it, and his punishment should leave a memory ineffaceable. Pondering on his future tribulation, sternly immersed in visions of justice, his voice startled her:

“The boat is in. Please keep close to me.”

Bump! creak – cre – ak! bump! Then came the clank of wheel and chain, and the crowded cabin, and pressing throngs which crushed her close to his shoulder; and, “Please take my arm,” he said; “I can protect you better so.”

A long, covered way, swarming with people, a glimpse of a street and whirling snowflakes, an iron fence pierced by gates where gilt-and-blue officials stood, saying, monotonously: "Tickets! Please show your tickets. This way for the Palmetto Special. The Eden Limited on track number three."

"Would you mind holding my umbrella a moment?" he asked.

She took it.

He produced the two tickets and they passed the gate, following a porter who carried their luggage.

Presently their porter climbed the steps of a sleeping-car. She followed and sat down beside her valise, resting her elbow on the polished window-sill, and her flushed cheek on her hand.

He passed her and continued on towards the end of the car, where she saw him engage in animated conversation with several officials. The officials shook their heads, and, after a while, he came slowly back to where she sat.

"I tried to exchange into another car," he said. "It cannot be done."

"Why do you wish to?" she asked, calmly.

"I suppose you would – would rather I did," he said. "I'll stay in the smoker all I can."

She made no comment. He stood staring gloomily at the floor.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, at last. "I'm not quite as selfish as you think. My – my younger brother is in a lot of trouble – down at St. Augustine. I couldn't have saved him if I hadn't caught this train... I know you can't forgive me; so I'll say – so I'll ask permission to say good-bye."

"Don't – please don't go," she said, faintly.

He wheeled towards her again.

"How on earth am I to dine if you go away?" she asked. "I've a thousand miles to go, and I've simply got to dine."

"What a stupid brute I am!" he said, between his teeth. "I try to be decent, but I can't. I'll do anything in the world to spare you – indeed I will. Tell me, would you prefer to dine alone – "

"Hush! people are listening," she said, in a low voice. "It's bad enough to be taken for bride and groom, but if people in this car think we've quarrelled I – I simply cannot endure it."

"Who took us for – that?" he whispered, fiercely.

"Those people behind you; don't look! I heard that horrid little boy say, 'B. and G.!' and others heard it. I – I think you had better sit down here a moment."

He sat down.

"The question is," she said, with heightened color, "whether it is less embarrassing for us to be civil to each other or to avoid each other. Everybody has seen the porter bring in our luggage; everybody supposes we are at least on friendly terms. If I go alone to the dining-car, and you go alone, gossip will begin. I'm miserable enough now – my position is false enough now. I – I cannot stand being stared at for thirty-six hours – "

"If you say so, I'll spread the rumor that you're my sister," he suggested, anxiously. "Shall I?"

Even she perceived the fatal futility of that suggestion.

"But when you take off your glove everybody will know we're not B. and G.," he insisted.

She hesitated; a delicate flush crept over her face; then she nervously stripped the glove from her left hand and extended it. A plain gold ring encircled the third finger. "What shall I do?" she whispered. "I can't get it off. I've tried, but I can't."

"Does it belong there?" he asked, seriously.

"You mean, am I married? No, no," she said, impatiently; "it's my grandmother's wedding-ring. I was just trying it on this morning – this morning of all mornings! Think of it!"

She looked anxiously at her white fingers, then at him.

"What do you think?" she asked, naïvely; "I've tried soap and cold-cream, but it won't come off."

“Well,” he said, with a forced laugh, “Fate appears to be personally conducting this tour, and it’s probably all right – ” He hesitated. “Perhaps it’s better than to wear no ring – ”

“Why?” she asked, innocently. “Oh! perhaps it’s better, after all, to be mistaken for B. and G. than for a pair of unchaperoned creatures. Is that what you mean?”

“Yes,” he said, vaguely.

There came a gentle jolt, a faint grinding sound, a vibration increasing. Lighted lanterns, red and green, glided past their window.

“We’ve started,” he said.

Then a negro porter came jauntily down the aisle, saying something in a low voice to everybody as he passed. And when he came to them he smiled encouragement and made an extra bow, murmuring, “First call for dinner, if you please, madam.”

They were the centre of discreet attention in the dining-car; and neither the ring on her wedding-finger nor their bearing and attitude towards each other were needed to confirm the general conviction.

He tried to do all he could to make it easy for her, but he didn’t know how, or he never would have ordered rice pudding with a confidence that set their own negro waiter grinning from ear to ear.

She bit her red lips and looked out of the window; but the window, blackened by night and quicksilvered by the snow, was only a mirror for a very lovely and distressed face.

Indeed, she was charming in her supposed rôle; their fellow-passengers’ criticisms were exceedingly favorable. Even the young imp who had pronounced them B. and G. with infantile unreserve appeared to be impressed by her fresh, young beauty; and an old clergyman across the aisle beamed on them at intervals, and every beam was a benediction.

As for them, embarrassment and depression were at first masked under a polite gayety; but the excitement of the drama gained on them; appearances were to be kept up in the rôles of a comedy absolutely forced upon them; and that brought exhilaration.

From mental self-absolution they ventured on mentally absolving each other. Fate had done it! Their consciences were free. Their situation was a challenge in itself, and to accept it must mean to conquer.

Stirring two lumps of sugar into his cup of coffee, he looked up suddenly, to find her gray eyes meeting his across the table. They smiled like friends.

“Of what are you thinking?” she asked.

“I was thinking that perhaps you had forgiven me,” he said, hopefully.

“I have” – she frowned a little – “I *think* I have.”

“And – you do not think me a coward?”

“No,” she said, watching him, chin propped on her linked fingers.

He laughed gratefully.

“As a matter of cold fact,” he observed, “if we had met anywhere in town – under other circumstances – there is no reason that I can see why we shouldn’t have become excellent friends.”

“No reason at all,” she said, thoughtfully.

“And that reminds me,” he went on, dropping his voice and leaning across the table, “I’m going to send back a telegram to my sister, and I fancy you may wish to send one to your wandering brother.”

“I suppose I’d better,” she said. An involuntary shiver passed over her. “He’s probably frantic,” she added.

“Probably,” he admitted.

“My father and mother are in Europe,” she observed. “I hope my brother hasn’t cabled them.”

“I think we’d better get those telegrams off,” he said, motioning the waiter to bring the blanks and find pen and ink.

They waited, gazing meditatively at each other. Presently he said:

"I'd like to tell you what it is that sends me flying down to Florida at an hour's notice. I think some explanation is due you – if it wouldn't bore you?"

"Tell me," she said, quietly.

"Why, then, it's that headlong idiot of a brother of mine," he explained. "He's going to try to marry a girl he has only known twenty-four hours – a girl we never heard of. And I'm on my way to stop it! – the young fool! – and I'll stop it if I have to drag him home by the heels! Here's the telegram we got late this afternoon – a regular bombshell." He drew the yellow bit of paper from his breast-pocket, unfolded it, and read:

"St. Augustine, Florida

"I am going to marry to-morrow the loveliest girl in the United States. Only met her yesterday. Love at first sight. You'll all worship her! She's eighteen, a New-Yorker, and her name is Marie Hetherford.

Jim."

He looked up angrily. "What do you think of that?" he demanded.

"Think?" she stammered – "think?" She dropped her hands helplessly, staring at him. "Marie Hetherford is my sister!" she said.

"Your – sister," he repeated, after a long pause – "*your* sister!"

She pressed a white hand to her forehead, clearing her eyes with a gesture.

"Isn't it too absurd!" she said, dreamily. "My sister sent us a telegram like yours. Our parents are abroad. So my brother and I threw some things into a trunk and – and started! Oh, did you *ever* hear of anything like this?"

"Your sister!" he repeated, dazed. "*My* brother and *your* sister. And I am on my way to stop it; and you are on your way to stop it – "

She began to laugh – not hysterically, but it was not a natural laugh.

"And," he went on, "I've lost another sister in the shuffle, and you've lost another brother in the shuffle, and now there's a double-shuffle danced by you and me – "

"Don't. *Don't!*" she said, faint from laughter.

"Yes, I will," he said. "And I'll say more! I'll say that Destiny is taking exclusive charge of our two families, and it would not surprise me if *your* brother and *my* sister were driving around New York together at this moment looking for us!"

Their laughter infected the entire dining-car; every waiter snickered; the *enfant terrible* grinned; the aged minister of the Church of England beamed a rapid fire of benedictions on them.

But they had forgotten everybody except each other.

"From what I hear and from what I know personally of your family," she said, "it seems to me that they never waste much time about anything."

"We are rather in that way," he admitted. "I have been in a hurry from the time you first met me – and you see what my brother is going to do."

"Going to do? Are you going to let him?"

"Let him?" He looked steadily at her, and she returned the gaze as steadily. "Yes," he said, "I'm going to let him. And if I tried to stop him I'd get my deserts. I think I know my brother Jim. And I fancy it would take more than his brother to drag him away from your sister." He hesitated a moment. "Is she like – like you?"

"A year younger – yes, we are alike... And you say that you are going to let him – marry her?"

"Yes – if you don't mind."

The challenge was in his eyes, and she accepted it.

"Is your brother Jim like you?"

“A year younger – yes... May he marry her?”

She strove to speak easily, but to her consternation she choked, and the bright color dyed her face from neck to hair.

This must not be: she must answer him. To flinch now would be impossible – giving a double meaning and double understanding to a badinage light as air. Alas! *Il ne faut pas badiner avec l’amour!* Then she answered, saying too much in an effort to say a little with careless and becoming courage.

“If he is like you, he may marry her... I am glad he is your brother.”

The answering fire burned in his face; she met his eyes, and twice her own fell before their message.

He leaned forward, elbows on the table, hot face between his hands; a careless attitude for others to observe, but a swift glance warned her what was coming – coming in a low, casual voice, checked at intervals as though he were swallowing.

“You are the most splendid girl I ever knew.” He dropped one hand and picked up a flower that had slipped from her finger-bowl. “You are the only person in the world who will not think me crazy for saying this. We’re a headlong race. Will you marry me?”

She bent her head thoughtfully, pressing her mouth to her clasped fingers. Her attitude was repose itself.

“Are you offended?” he asked, looking out of the window.

There was a slight negative motion of her head.

A party of assorted travellers rose from their table and passed them, smiling discreetly; the old minister across the aisle mused in his coffee-cup, caressing his shaven face with wrinkled fingers. The dining-car grew very still.

“It’s in the blood,” he said, under his breath; “my grandparents eloped; my father’s courtship lasted three days from the time he first met my mother – you see what my brother has done in twenty-four hours... We do things more quickly in these days... Please —*please* don’t look so unhappy!”

“I – I am not unhappy... I am willing to – hear you. You were saying something about – about –”

“About love.”

“I – think so. Wait until those people pass!”

He waited, apparently hypnotized by the beauty of the car ceiling. Then: “Of course, if you were not going to be my sister-in-law to-morrow, I’d not go into family matters.”

“No, of course not,” she murmured.

So he gave her a brief outline of his own affairs, and she listened with bent head until there came the pause which was her own cue.

“Why do you tell me this?” she asked, innocently.

“It – it – why, because I love you.”

On common ground once more, she prepared for battle, but to her consternation she found the battle already ended and an enemy calmly preparing for her surrender.

“But when – when do you propose to – to do this?” she asked, in an unsteady voice.

“Now,” he said, firmly.

“Now? Marry me at once?”

“I love you enough to wait a million years – but I won’t. I always expected to fall in love; I’ve rather fancied it would come like this when it came; and I swore I’d never let the chance slip by. We’re a headlong family – but a singularly loyal one. We love but once in our lifetime; and when we love we know it.”

“Do you think that this is that one time?”

“There is no doubt left in me.”

“Then” – she covered her face with her hands, leaning heavily on the table – “then what on earth are we to do?”

“Promise each other to love.”

“Do you promise?”

“Yes, I do promise, forever. Do you?”

She looked up, pale as a ghost. “Yes,” she said.

“Then – please say it,” he whispered.

Some people rose and left the car. She sat apparently buried in colorless reverie. Twice her voice failed her; he bent nearer; and —

“I love you,” she said.

A PILGRIM

I

THE servants had gathered in the front hall to inspect the new arrival – cook, kitchen-maid, butler, flanked on the right by parlor-maids, on the left by a footman and a small buttons.

The new arrival was a snow-white bull-terrier, alert, ardent, quivering in expectation of a welcome among these strangers, madly wagging his whiplike tail in passionate silence.

When the mistress of the house at last came down the great stone stairway, the servants fell back in a semi-circle, leaving her face to face with the white bull-terrier.

“So *that* is the dog!” she said, in faint astonishment. A respectful murmur of assent corroborated her conclusion.

The dog’s eyes met hers; she turned to the servants with a perplexed gesture.

“Is the brougham at the door?” asked the young mistress of the house.

The footman signified that it was.

“Then tell Phelan to come here at once.”

Phelan, the coachman, arrived, large, rosy, freshly shaven, admirably correct.

“Phelan,” said the young mistress, “look at that dog.”

The coachman promptly fixed his eyes on the wagging bull-terrier. In spite of his decorous gravity a smile of distinct pleasure slowly spread over his square, pink face until it became a subdued simper.

“Is that a well-bred dog, Phelan?” demanded the young mistress.

“It is, ma’am,” replied Phelan, promptly.

“Very well bred?”

“Very, ma’am.”

“Dangerous?”

“In a fight, ma’am.” Stifled enthusiasm swelled the veins in the coachman’s forehead. Triumphant pæans of praise for the bull-terrier trembled upon his lips; but he stood rigid, correct, a martyr to his perfect training.

“Say what you wish to say, Phelan,” prompted the young mistress, with a hasty glance at the dog.

“Thanky, ma’am... The bull is the finest I ever laid eyes on... He hasn’t a blemish, ma’am; and the three years of him doubled will leave him three years to his prime, ma’am... And there’s never another bull, nor a screw-tail, nor cross, be it mastiff or fox or whippet, ma’am, that can loose the holt o’ thim twin jaws... Beg pardon, ma’am, I know the dog.”

“You mean that you have seen that dog before?”

“Yes, ma’am; he won his class from a pup at the Garden. That is ‘His Highness,’ ma’am, Mr. Langham’s champion three-year.”

She had already stooped to caress the silent, eager dog – timidly, because she had never before owned a dog – but at the mention of his master’s name she drew back sharply and stood erect.

“Never fear, ma’am,” said the coachman, eagerly; “he won’t bite, ma’am – ”

“Mr. Langham’s dog?” she repeated, coldly; and then, without another glance at either the dog or the coachman, she turned to the front door; buttons swung it wide with infantile dignity; a moment later she was in her brougham, with Phelan on the box and the rigid footman expectant at the window.

II

Seated in a corner of her brougham, she saw the world pass on flashing wheels along the asphalt; she saw the April sunshine slanting across brown-stone mansions and the glass-fronted façades of shops; ... she looked without seeing.

So Langham had sent her his dog! In the first year of her widowhood she had first met Langham; she was then twenty-one. In the second year of her widowhood Langham had offered himself, and, with the declaration on his lips, had seen the utter hopelessness of his offer. They had not met since then. And now, in the third year of her widowhood, he offered her his dog!

She had at first intended to keep the dog. Knowing nothing of animals, discouraged from all sporting fads by a husband who himself was devoted to animals dedicated to sport, she had quietly acquiesced in her husband's dictum that "horse-women and dog-women made a man ill!" – and so dismissed any idea she might have entertained towards the harboring of the four-footed.

A miserable consciousness smote her: why had she allowed the memory of her husband to fade so amazingly in these last two months of early spring? Of late, when she wished to fix her thoughts upon her late husband and to conjure his face before her closed eyes, she found that the mental apparition came with more and more difficulty.

Sitting in a corner of her brougham, the sharp rhythm of her horses' hoofs tuning her thoughts, she quietly endeavored to raise that cherished mental spectre, but could not, until by hazard she remembered the portrait of her husband hanging in the smoking-room.

But instantly she strove to put that away; the portrait was by Sargent, a portrait she had always disliked, because the great painter had painted an expression into her husband's face which she had never seen there. An aged and unbearable aunt of hers had declared that Sargent painted beneath the surface; she resented the suggestion, because what she read beneath the surface of her husband's portrait sent hot blood into her face.

Thinking of these things, she saw the spring sunshine gilding the gray branches of the park trees. Here and there elms spread tinted with green; chestnuts and maples were already in the full glory of new leaves; the leafless twisted tangles of wistaria hung thick with scented purple bloom; everywhere the scarlet blossoms of the Japanese quince glowed on naked shrubs, bedded in green lawns.

Her husband had loved the country... There was one spot in the world which he had loved above all others – the Sagamore Angling Club. She had never been there. But she meant to go. Probably tomorrow... And before she went she must send that dog back to Langham.

At the cathedral she signalled to stop, and sent the brougham back, saying she would walk home. And the first man she met was Langham.

III

There was nothing extraordinary in it. His club was there on the corner, and it was exactly his hour for the club.

"It is so very fortunate ... for me," he said. "I did want to see you... I am going north to-morrow."

"Of course it's about the dog," she said, pleasantly.

He laughed. "I am so glad that you will accept him – "

"But I can't," she said; ... "and thank you so much for asking me."

For a moment his expression touched her, but she could not permit expressions of men's faces to arouse her compunction, so she turned her eyes resolutely ahead towards the spire of the marble church.

He walked beside her in silence.

"I also am going north to-morrow," she said, politely.

He did not answer.

Every day since her widowhood, every day for three years, she had decided to make that pilgrimage ... some time. And now, crossing Union Square on that lovely afternoon late in April, she knew that the time had come. Not that there was any reason for haste. ... At the vague thought her brown eyes rested a moment on the tall young man beside her...

Yes ... she would go ... to-morrow.

A vender of violets shuffled up beside them; Langham picked up a dewy bundle of blossoms, and their perfume seemed to saturate the air till it tasted on the tongue.

She shook her head. "No, no, please; the fragrance is too heavy."...

"Won't you accept them?" he inquired, bluntly.

Again she shook her head; there was indecision in the smile, assent in the gesture. However, he perceived neither.

She took a short step forward. The wind whipped the fountain jet, and a fanlike cloud of spray drifted off across the asphalt. Then they moved on together.

Presently she said, quietly, "I believe I will carry a bunch of those violets;" and she waited for him to go back through the fountain spray, find the peddler, and rummage among the perfumed heaps in the basket. "Because," she added, cheerfully, as he returned with the flowers, "I am going to the East Tenth Street Mission, and I meant to take some flowers, anyway."

"If you would keep that cluster and let me send the whole basket to your mission – " he began.

But she had already started on across the wet pavement.

"I did not know you were going to give my flowers to those cripples," he said, keeping pace with her.

"Do you mind?" she asked, but she had not meant to say that, and she walked a little more quickly to escape the quick reply.

"I want to ask you something," he said, after a moment's brisk walking. "I wish – if you don't mind – I wish you would walk around the square with me – just once – "

"Certainly not," she said; "and now you will say good-bye – because you are going away, you say." She had stopped at the Fourth Avenue edge of the square. "So good-bye, and thank you for the beautiful dog, and for the violets."

"But you won't keep the dog, and you won't keep the violets," he said; "and, besides, if you are going north – "

"Good-bye," she repeated, smiling.

"– besides," he went on, "I would like to know where you are going."

"That," she said, "is what I do not wish to tell you – or anybody."

There was a brief silence; the charm of her bent head distracted him.

"If you won't go," she said, with caprice, "I will walk once around the square with you, but it is the silliest thing I have ever done in my entire life."

"Why won't you keep the bull-terrier?" he asked, humbly.

"Because I'm going north – for one reason."

"Couldn't you take His Highness?"

"No – that is, I could, but – I can't explain – he would distract me."

"Shall I take him back, then?"

"Why?" she demanded, surprised.

"I – only I thought if you did not care for him – " he stammered. "You see, I love the dog."

She bit her lip and bent her eyes on the ground. Again he quickened his pace to keep step with her.

"You see," he said, searching about for the right phrase, "I wanted you to have something that I could venture to offer you – er – something not valuable – er – I mean not – er – "

"Your dog is a very valuable champion; everybody knows that," she said, carelessly.

"Oh yes – he's a corker in his line; out of Empress by Ameer, you know – "

"I might manage ... to keep him ... for a while," she observed, without enthusiasm. "At all events, I shall tie my violets to his collar."

He watched her; the roar of Broadway died out in his ears; in hers it grew, increasing, louder, louder. A dim scene rose unbidden before her eyes – the high gloom of a cathedral, the great organ's first unsteady throbbing – her wedding-march! No, not that; for while she stood, coldly transfixed in centred self-absorption, she seemed to see a shapeless mass of wreaths piled in the twilight of an altar – the dreadful pomp and panoply and circumstance of death —

She raised her eyes to the man beside her; her whole being vibrated with the menace of a dirge, and in the roar of traffic around her she divined the imprisoned thunder of the organ pealing for her dead.

She turned her head sharply towards the west.

"What is it?" he asked, in the voice of a man who needs no answer to his question.

She kept her head steadily turned. Through Fifteenth Street the sun poured a red light that deepened as the mist rose from the docks. She heard the river whistles blowing; an electric light broke out through the bay haze.

It was true she was thinking of her husband – thinking of him almost desperately, distressed that already he should have become to her nothing more vital than a memory.

Unconscious of the man beside her, she stood there in the red glow, straining eyes and memory to focus both on a past that receded and seemed to dwindle to a point of utter vacancy.

Then her husband's face grew out of vacancy, so real, so living, that she started – to find herself walking slowly past the fountain with Langham at her side.

After a moment she said: "Now we have walked all around the square. Now I am going to walk home; ... and thank you ... for my walk, ... which was probably as wholesome a performance as I could have indulged in – and quite unconventional enough, even for you."

They faced about and traversed the square, crossed Broadway in silence, passed through the kindling shadows of the long cross-street, and turned into Fifth Avenue.

"You are very silent," she said, sorry at once that she had said it, uncertain as to the trend his speech might follow, and withal curious.

"It was only about that dog," he said.

She wondered if it was exactly that, and decided it was not. It was not. He was thinking of her husband as he had known him – only by sight and by report. He remembered the florid gentleman perfectly; he had often seen him tooling his four; he had seen him at the traps in Monte Carlo, dividing with the best shot in Italy; he had seen him riding to hounds a few days before that fatal run of the

Shadowbrook Hunt, where he had taken his last fence. Once, too, he had seen him at the Sagamore Angling Club up state.

“When are you going?” he said, suddenly.

“To-morrow.”

“I am not to know where?”

“Why should you?” and then, a little quickly: “No, no. It is a pilgrimage.”

“When you return – ” he began, but she shook her head.

“No, ... no. I do not know where I may be.”

In the April twilight the electric lamps along the avenue snapped alight. The air rang with the metallic chatter of sparrows.

They mounted the steps of her house; she turned and swept the dim avenue with a casual glance.

“So you, too, are going north?” she asked, pleasantly.

“Yes – to-night.”

She gave him her hand. She felt the pressure of his hand on her gloved fingers after he had gone, although their hands had scarcely touched at all.

And so she went into the dimly lighted house, through the drawing-room, which was quite dark, into the music-room beyond; and there she sat down upon a chair by the piano – a little gilded chair that revolved as she pushed herself idly, now to the right, now to the left.

Yes, ... after all, she would go; ... she would make that pilgrimage to the spot on earth her husband loved best of all – the sweet waters of the Sagamore, where his beloved club lodge stood, and whither, for a month every year, he had repaired with some old friends to renew a bachelor’s love for angling.

She had never accompanied him on these trips; she instinctively divined a man’s desire for a ramble among old haunts with old friends, freed for a brief space from the happy burdens of domesticity.

The lodge on the Sagamore was now her shrine; there she would rest and think of him, follow his footsteps to his best-loved haunts, wander along the rivers where he had wandered, dream by the streams where he had dreamed.

She had married her husband out of awe, sheer awe for his wonderful personality. And he was wonderful; faultless in everything – though not so faultless as to be in bad taste, she often told herself. His *entourage* also was faultless; and the general faultlessness of everything had made her married life very perfect.

As she sat thinking in the darkened music-room, something stirred in the hallway outside. She raised her eyes; the white bull-terrier stood in the lighted doorway, looking in at her.

A perfectly incomprehensible and resistless rush of loneliness swept her to her feet; in a moment she was down on the floor again, on her silken knees, her arms around the dog, her head pressed tightly to his head.

“Oh,” she said, choking, “I must go to-morrow – I must – I must... And here are the violets; ... I will tie them to your collar... Hold still!.. He loves you; ... but you shall not have them – do you hear?.. No, no, ... for I shall wear them, ... for I like their odor; ... and, anyway, ... I am going away.”...

IV

The next day she began her pilgrimage; and His Highness went with her; and a maid from the British Isles.

She had telegraphed to the Sagamore Club for rooms, to make sure, but that was unnecessary, because there were at the moment only three members of the club at the lodge.

Now although she herself could scarcely be considered a member of the Sagamore Angling Club, she still controlled her husband's shares in the concern, and she was duly and impressively welcomed by the steward. Two of the three members domiciled there came up to pay their respects when she alighted from the muddy buckboard sent to the railway to meet her; they were her husband's old friends, Colonel Hyssop and Major Brent, white-haired, purple-faced, well-groomed gentlemen in the early fifties. The third member was out in the rain fishing somewhere down-stream.

"New man here, madam – a good fellow, but a bad rod – eh, Brent?"

"Bad rod," repeated Major Brent, wagging his fat head. "Uses ferrules to a six-ounce rod. *We* splice – eh, Colonel?"

"Certainly," said the Colonel.

She stood by the open fire in the centre of the hallway, holding her shapely hands out towards the blaze, while her maid relieved her of the wet rain-coat.

"Splice what, Colonel Hyssop, if you please?" she inquired, smiling.

"Splice our rods, madam – no creaky joints and ferrules for old hands like Major Brent and me, ma'am. Do you throw a fly?"

"Oh no," she said, with a faint smile. "I – I do nothing."

"Except to remain the handsomest woman in the five boroughs!" said the Major, with a futile attempt to bend at the waist – utterly unsuccessful, yet impressive.

She dropped him a courtesy, then took the glass of sherry that the steward brought and sipped it, meditative eyes on the blazing logs. Presently she held out the empty wine-glass; the steward took it on his heavy silver salver; she raised her eyes. A half-length portrait of her husband stared at her from over the mantel, lighted an infernal red in the fire-glow.

A catch in her throat, a momentary twitch of the lips, then she gazed calmly up into the familiar face.

Under the frame of the picture was written his full hyphenated name; following that she read:

President and Founder

of

The Sagamore Angling Club

1880–1901

Major Brent and Colonel Hyssop observed her in decorously suppressed sympathy.

"I did not know he was president," she said, after a moment; "he never told me that."

"Those who knew him best understood his rare modesty," said Major Brent. "I knew him, madam; I honored him; I honor his memory."

“He was not only president and founder,” observed Colonel Hyssop, “but he owned three-quarters of the stock.”

“Are the shares valuable?” she asked. “I have them; I should be glad to give them to the club, Colonel Hyssop – in his memory.”

“Good gad! madam,” said the Colonel, “the shares are worth five thousand apiece!”

“I am the happier to give them – if the club will accept,” she said, flushing, embarrassed, fearful of posing as a Lady Bountiful before anybody. She added, hastily, “You must direct me in the matter, Colonel Hyssop; we can talk of it later.”

Again she looked up into her husband’s face over the mantel.

Her bull-terrier came trotting into the hall, his polished nails and padded feet beating a patter across the hardwood floor.

“I shall dine in my own rooms this evening,” she said, smiling vaguely at the approaching dog.

“We hoped to welcome you to the club table,” cried the Major.

“There are only the Major and myself,” added the Colonel, with courteous entreaty.

“And the other – the new man,” corrected the Major, with a wry face.

“Oh yes – the bad rod. What’s his name?”

“Langham,” said the Major.

The English maid came down to conduct her mistress to her rooms; the two gentlemen bowed as their build permitted; the bull-terrier trotted behind his mistress up the polished stairs. Presently a door closed above.

“Devilish fine woman,” said Major Brent.

Colonel Hyssop went to a mirror and examined himself with close attention.

“Good gad!” he said, irritably, “how thin my hair is!”

“Thin!” said Major Brent, with an unpleasant laugh; “thin as the hair on a Mexican poodle.”

“You infernal ass!” hissed the Colonel, and waddled off to dress for dinner. At the door he paused. “Better have no hair than a complexion like a violet!”

“What’s that?” cried the Major.

The Colonel slammed the door.

Up-stairs the bull-terrier lay on a rug watching his mistress with tireless eyes. The maid brought tea, bread and butter, and trout fried crisp, for her mistress desired nothing else.

Left alone, she leaned back, sipping her tea, listening to the million tiny voices of the night. The stillness of the country made her nervous after the clatter of town. Nervous? Was it the tranquil stillness of the night outside that stirred that growing apprehension in her breast till, of a sudden, her heart began a deadened throbbing?

Langham here? What was he doing here? He must have arrived this morning. So that was where he was going when he said he was going north!

After all, in what did it concern her? She had not run away from town to avoid him, ... indeed not, ... her pilgrimage was her own affair. And Langham would very quickly divine her pious impulse in coming here... And he would doubtless respect her for it... Perhaps have the subtle tact to pack up his traps and leave... But probably not... She knew a little about Langham, ... an obstinate and typical man, ... doubtless selfish to the core, ... cheerfully, naïvely selfish...

She raised her troubled eyes. Over the door was printed in gilt letters:

The President’s Suite.

Tears filled her eyes; truly they were kindly and thoughtful, these old friends of her husband.

And all night long she slept in the room of her late husband, the president of the Sagamore Angling Club, and dreamed till daybreak of ... Langham.

V

Langham, clad in tweeds from head to foot, sat on the edge of his bed.

He had been sitting there since daybreak, and the expression on his ornamental face had varied between the blank and the idiotic. That the only woman in the world had miraculously appeared at Sagamore Lodge he had heard from Colonel Hyssop and Major Brent at dinner the evening before.

That she already knew of his presence there he could not doubt. That she did not desire his presence he was fearsomely persuaded.

Clearly he must go – not at once, of course, to leave behind him a possibility for gossip at his abrupt departure. From the tongues of infants and well-fed club-men, good Lord deliver us!

He must go. Meanwhile he could easily avoid her.

And as he sat there, savoring all the pent-up bitterness poured out for him by destiny, there came a patter of padded feet in the hallway, the scrape of nails, a sniff at the door-sill, a whine, a frantic scratching. He leaned forward and opened the door. His Highness landed on the bed with one hysterical yelp and fell upon Langham, paw and muzzle.

When their affection had been temporarily satiated, the dog lay down on the bed, eyes riveted on his late master, and the man went over to his desk, drew a sheet of club paper towards him, found a pen, and wrote:

“Of course it is an unhappy coincidence, and I will go when I can do so decently – to-morrow morning. Meanwhile I shall be away all day fishing the West Branch, and shall return too late to dine at the club table.

“I wish you a happy sojourn here – ”

This he reread and scratched out.

“I am glad you kept His Highness.”

This he also scratched out.

After a while he signed his name to the note, sealed it, and stepped into the hallway.

At the farther end of the passage the door of her room was ajar; a sunlit-scarlet curtain hung inside.

“Come here!” said Langham to the dog.

His Highness came with a single leap.

“Take it to ... her,” said the man, under his breath. Then he turned sharply, picked up rod and creel, and descended the stairs.

Meanwhile His Highness entered his mistress’s chamber, with a polite scratch as a “by your leave!” and trotted up to her, holding out the note in his pink mouth.

She looked at the dog in astonishment. Then the handwriting on the envelope caught her eye.

As she did not offer to touch the missive, His Highness presently sat down and crowded up against her knees. Then he laid the letter in her lap.

Her expression became inscrutable as she picked up the letter; while she was reading it there was color in her cheeks; after she had read it there was less.

“I see no necessity,” she said to His Highness – “I see no necessity for his going. I think I ought to tell him so... He overestimates the importance of a matter which does not concern him... He is sublimely self-conscious, ... a typical man. And if he presumes to believe that the hazard of our encounter is of the slightest moment ... to me ...”

The dog dropped his head in her lap.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that!” she said, almost sharply, but there was a dry catch in her throat when she spoke, and she laid one fair hand on the head of His Highness.

A few moments later she went down-stairs to the great hall, where she found Colonel Hyssop and Major Brent just finishing their morning cocktails.

When they could at last comprehend that she never began her breakfast with a cocktail, they conducted her solemnly to the breakfast-room, seated her with *empressement*, and the coffee was served.

It was a delicious, old-fashioned, country breakfast – crisp trout, bacon, eggs, and mounds of fragrant flapjacks.

“Langham’s gone off to the West Branch; left duty’s compliments and all that sort of thing for you,” observed the Colonel, testing his coffee with an air.

His Highness, who had sniffed the bacon, got up on a chair where he could sit and view the table. Moisture gathered on his jet-black nose; he licked his jowl.

“You poor darling!” cried his mistress, rising impulsively, with her plate in her hand. She set the plate on the floor. It was cleaned with a snap, then carefully polished.

“You are fond of your dog, madam,” said the Major, much interested.

“He’s a fine one,” added the Colonel. “Gad! I took him for Langham’s champion at first.”

She bent her head over the dog’s plate.

Later she walked to the porch, followed by His Highness.

A lovely little path invited them on – a path made springy by trodden leaves; and the dog and his mistress strolled forth among clumps of hazel and silver-birches, past ranks of alders and Indian-willows, on across log bridges spanning tiny threads of streams which poured into the stony river.

The unceasing chorus of the birds freshened like wind in her ears. Spring echoes sounded from blue distances; the solemn congress of the forest trees in session murmured of summers past and summers to come.

How could her soul sink in the presence of the young world’s uplifting?

Her dog came back and looked up into her eyes. With a cry, which was half laughter, she raced with him along the path, scattering the wild birds into flight from bush and thicket.

Breathless, rosy, she halted at the river’s shallow edge.

Flung full length on the grass, she dipped her white fingers in the river, and dropped wind-flowers on the ripples to watch them dance away.

She listened to the world around her; it had much to say to her if she would only believe it. But she forced her mind back to her husband and lay brooding.

An old man in leggings and corduroys came stumping along the path; His Highness heard him coming and turned his keen head. Then he went and stood in front of his mistress, calm, inquisitive, dangerous.

“Mornin’, miss,” said the keeper; “I guess you must be one of our folks.”

“I am staying at the club-house,” she said, smiling, and sitting up on the grass.

“I’m old Peter, one o’ the guards,” he said. “Fine mornin’, miss, but a leetle bright for the fish – though I ain’t denyin’ that a small dark fly’d raise ’em; no’m. If I was sot on ketchin’ a mess o’ fish, I guess a hare’s-ear would do the business; yes’m. I jest passed Mr. Langham down to the forks, and I seed he was a-chuckin’ a hare’s-ear; an’ he riz ’em, too; yes’m.”

“How long have you been a keeper here?” she asked.

“How long, ’m? Waal, I was the fustest guard they had; yes’m. I live down here a piece. They bought my water rights; yes’m. An’ they give me the job. The president he sez to me, ‘Peter,’ he sez, jest like that – ‘Peter, you was raised here; you know all them brooks an’ rivers like a mink; you stay right here an’ watch ’em, an’ I’ll do the squar’ by ye,’ he sez, jest like that. An’ he done it; yes’m.”

“So you knew the president, then?” she asked, in a low voice.

“Knew him? —*him*? Yes’m.”

The old man laughed a hollow, toothless laugh, and squinted out across the dazzling river.

“Knew him twenty year, I did. A good man, and fair at that. Why, I’ve seen him a-settin’ jest where you’re settin’ this minute – seen him a hundred times a-settin’ there.”

“Fishing?” she said, in an awed voice.

“Sometimes. Sometimes he was a-drinkin’ out o’ that silver pocket-pistol o’ his’n. He got drunk a lot up here; but he didn’t drink alone; no’m. There wasn’t a stingy hair in his head; he – ”

“Do you mean the president?” she said, incredulously, almost angrily.

“Him? Yes’m. Him an’ Colonel Hyssop an’ Major Brent; they had good times in them days.”

“You knew the president *before* his marriage,” she observed, coldly.

“Him? He wasn’t never married, miss!” said the old man, scornfully.

“Are you sure?” she asked, with a troubled smile.

“Sure? Yes’m. Why, the last time he was up here, three year come July Fourth, I seen him a-kissin’ an’ a-huggin’ of old man Dawson’s darter – ”

She was on her feet in a flash. The old man stood there smiling his senile smile and squinting out across the water, absorbed in his garrulous reminiscence.

“Yes’m; all the folks down to the village was fond o’ the president, he was that jolly and free, an’ no stuck-up city airs; no’m; jest free and easy, an’ a-sparkin’ the gals with the best o’ them – ”

The old man laughed and crossed his arms under the barrel of his shot-gun.

“Folks said he might o’ married old man Dawson’s darter if he’d lived. I dun’no’. I guess it was all fun. But I hear the gal took on awful when they told her he was dead; yes’m.”

VI

Towards evening Langham waded across the river, drew in his dripping line, put up his rod, and counted and weighed his fish. Then, lighting a pipe, he reslung the heavy creel across his back and started up the darkening path. From his dripping tweeds the water oozed; his shoes wheezed and slopped at every step; he was tired, soaked, successful – but happy? Possibly.

It was dark when the lighted windows of the lodge twinkled across the hill; he struck out over the meadow, head bent, smoking furiously.

On the steps of the club-house Colonel Hyssop and Major Brent greeted him with the affected heartiness of men who disliked his angling methods; the steward brought out a pan; the fish were uncreeled, reweighed, measured, and entered on the club book.

“Finest creel this year, sir,” said the steward, admiringly.

The Major grew purple; the Colonel carefully remeasured the largest fish.

“Twenty-one inches, steward!” he said. “Wasn’t my big fish of last Thursday twenty-two?”

“Nineteen, sir,” said the steward, promptly.

“Then it shrank like the devil!” said the Colonel. “By gad! it must have shrunk in the creel!”

But Langham was in no mood to savor his triumph. He climbed the stairs wearily, leaving little puddles of water on each step, slopped down the hallway, entered his room, and sank into a chair, too weary, too sad even to think.

Presently he lighted his lamp. He dressed with his usual attention to detail, and touched the electric button above his bed.

“I’m going to-morrow morning,” he said to the servant who came; “return in an hour and pack my traps.”

Langham sat down. He had no inclination for dinner. With his chin propped on his clinched hands he sat there thinking. A sound fell on his ear, the closing of a door at the end of the hall, the padded pattering of a dog’s feet, a scratching, a whine.

He opened his door; the bull-terrier trotted in and stood before him in silence. His Highness held in his mouth a letter.

Langham took the note with hands that shook. He could scarcely steady them to open the envelope; he could scarcely see to read the line:

“Why are you going away?”

He rose, made his way to his desk like a blind man, and wrote,

“Because I love you.”

His Highness bore the missive away.

For an hour he sat there in the lamp-lit room. The servant came to pack up for him, but he sent the man back, saying that he *might* change his mind. Then he resumed his waiting, his head buried in his hands. At last, when he could endure the silence no longer, he rose and walked the floor, backward, forward, pausing breathless to listen for the patter of the dog’s feet in the hall. But no sound came; he stole to the door and listened, then stepped into the hall. The light still burned in her room, streaming out through the transom.

She would never send another message to him by His Highness; he understood that now. How he cursed himself for his momentary delusion! how he scorned himself for reading anything but friendly kindness in her message! how he burned with self-contempt for his raw, brutal reply, crude as the blurted offer of a yokel!

That settled the matter. If he had any decency left, he must never offend her eyes again. How could he have hoped? How could he have done it? Here, too! – here in this place so sanctified to her by associations – here, whither she had come upon her pious pilgrimage – here, where at least he might have left her to her dead!

Suddenly, as he stood there, her door opened. She saw him standing there. For a full minute they faced each other. Presently His Highness emerged from behind his mistress and trotted out into the hall.

Behind His Highness came his mistress, slowly, more slowly. The dog carefully held a letter between his teeth, and when Langham saw it he sprang forward eagerly.

“No, no!” she said. “I did not mean – I cannot – I cannot – Give me back the letter!”

He had the letter in his hand; her hand fell over it; the color surged into her face and neck. The letter dropped from her yielding hand; the thrill from their interlocked fingers made her faint, and she swayed forward towards him, so close that their lips touched, then clung, crushed in their first kiss...

Meanwhile His Highness picked up the letter and stood politely waiting.

THE SHINING BAND

I

BEFORE the members of the Sagamore Fish and Game Association had erected their handsome club-house, and before they had begun to purchase those thousands of acres of forest, mountain, and stream which now belonged to them, a speculative lumberman with no capital, named O'Hara, built the white house across the river on a few acres of inherited property, settled himself comfortably with his wife and child, and prepared to acquire all the timber in sight at a few dollars an acre ... on credit. For thus, thought he, is the beginning of all millionaires.

So certain was O'Hara of ultimately cornering the standing timber that he took his time about it, never dreaming that a rival might disturb him in the wilderness of Sagamore County.

He began in the woodland which he had inherited, which ran for a mile on either side of the river. This he leisurely cut, hired a few river drivers, ran a few logs to Foxville, and made money.

Now he was ready to extend business on a greater scale; but when he came to open negotiations with the score or more of landholders, he found himself in the alarming position of a bidder against an unknown but clever rival, who watched, waited, and quietly forestalled his every movement.

It took a long time for O'Hara to discover that he was fighting a combination of fifteen wealthy gentlemen from New York. Finally, when the Sagamore Club, limited to fifteen, had completed operations, O'Hara suddenly perceived that he was bottled up in the strip of worthless land which he had inherited, surrounded by thousands of acres of preserved property – outwitted, powerless, completely hemmed in. And that, too, with the best log-driving water betwixt Foxville and Canada washing the very door-sill of his own home.

At first he naturally offered to sell, but the club's small offer enraged him, and he swore that he would never sell them an inch of his land. He watched the new club-house which was slowly taking shape under the trowels of masons and the mallets of carpenters; and his wrath grew as grew the house.

The man's nature began to change; an inextinguishable hatred for these people took possession of him, became his mania, his existence.

His wife died; he sent his child to a convent school in Canada and remained to watch. He did the club what damage he could, posting his property, and as much of the river as he controlled. But he could not legally prevent fishermen from wading the stream and fishing; so he filled the waters with sawdust, logs, barbed-wire, brambles, and brush, choking it so that no living creature, except perhaps a mink, could catch a fish in it.

The club protested, and then offered to buy the land on O'Hara's own terms. O'Hara cursed them and built a dam without a fishway, and sat beside it nights with a loaded shot-gun.

He still had a few dollars left; he wanted millions to crush these rich men who had come here to mock him and take the bread out of his mouth for their summer's sport.

He had a shrewd young friend in New York, named Amasa Munn. Through this man, O'Hara began to speculate in every wild-cat scheme that squalled aloud for public support; and between Munn and the wild-cats his little fortune spread its wings of gold and soared away, leaving him a wreck on his wrecked land.

But he could still find strength to watch the spite dam with his shot-gun. One day a better scheme came into his unbalanced brain; he broke the dam and sent for Munn. Between them they laid a plan to ruin forever the trout-fishing in the Sagamore; and Munn, taking the last of O'Hara's money as a bribe, actually secured several barrels full of live pickerel, and shipped them to the nearest station on the Sagamore and Inland Railway.

But here the club watchers caught Munn, and held him and his fish for the game-wardens. The penalty for introducing trout-destroying pickerel into waters inhabited by trout was a heavy fine. Munn was guilty only in intent, but the club keepers swore falsely, and Peyster Sprowl, a lawyer and also the new president of the Sagamore Club, pushed the case; and Munn went to jail, having no money left to purge his sentence.

O'Hara, wild with rage, wrote, threatening Sprowl.

Then Sprowl did a vindictive and therefore foolish thing: he swore out a warrant for O'Hara's arrest, charging him with blackmail.

The case was tried in Foxville, and O'Hara was acquitted. But a chance word or two during the testimony frightened the club and gave O'Hara the opportunity of his life. He went to New York and scraped up enough money for his purpose, which was to search the titles of the lands controlled by the Sagamore Club.

He worked secretly, grubbing, saving, starving; he ferreted out the original grants covering nine-tenths of Sagamore County; he disinterred the O'Hara patent of 1760; and then he began to understand that his title to the entire Sagamore Club property was worth the services, on spec, of any first-class Centre Street shyster.

The club got wind of this and appointed Peyster Sprowl, in his capacity of lawyer and president of the club, to find out how much of a claim O'Hara really had. The club also placed the emergency fund of one hundred thousand dollars at Sprowl's command with *carte-blanche* orders to arrest a suit and satisfy any claim that could not be beaten by money and talent.

Now it took Sprowl a very short time to discover that O'Hara's claim was probably valid enough to oust the club from three-quarters of its present holdings.

He tried to see O'Hara, but the lumberman refused to be interviewed, and promptly began proceedings. He also made his will; for he was a sick man. Then he became a sicker man, and suspended proceedings and sent for his little daughter.

Before she arrived he called Munn in, gave him a packet of papers, and made him burn them before his eyes.

"They're the papers in my case," he said. "I'm dying; I've fought too hard. I don't want my child to fight when I'm dead. And there's nothing in my claim, anyway." This was a lie, and Munn suspected it.

When the child, Eileen, arrived, O'Hara was nearly dead, but he gathered sufficient strength to shove a locked steel box towards his daughter and tell her to keep it from Munn, and keep it locked until she found an honest man in the world.

The next morning O'Hara appeared to be much better. His friend Munn came to see him; also came Peyster Sprowl in some alarm, on the matter of the proceedings threatened. But O'Hara turned his back on them both and calmly closed his eyes and ears to their presence.

Munn went out of the room, but laid his large, thin ear against the door. Sprowl worried O'Hara for an hour, but, getting no reply from the man in the bed, withdrew at last with considerable violence.

O'Hara, however, had fooled them both: he had been dead all the while.

The day after the funeral, Sprowl came back to look for O'Hara's daughter; and as he peeped into the door of the squalid flat he saw a thin, yellow-eyed young man, with a bony face, all furry in promise of future whiskers, rummaging through O'Hara's effects. This young gentleman was Munn.

In a dark corner of the disordered room sat the child, Eileen, a white, shadowy elf of six, reading in the Book of Common Prayer.

Sprowl entered the room; Munn looked up, then coolly continued to rummage.

Sprowl first addressed himself to the child, in a heavy, patronizing voice:

"It's too dark to read there in that corner, young one. Take your book out into the hall."

"I can see better to read in the dark," said the child, lifting her great, dark-blue eyes.

"Go out into the hall," said Sprowl, sharply.

The child shrank back, and went, taking her little jacket in one hand, her battered travelling-satchel in the other.

If the two men could have known that the steel box was in that satchel this story might never have been told. But it never entered their heads that the pallid little waif had sense enough to conceal a button to her own profit.

“Munn,” said Sprowl, lighting a cigar, “what is there in this business?”

“I’ll tell you when I’m done,” observed Munn, coolly.

Sprowl sat down on the bed where O’Hara had died, cocked the cigar up in his mouth, and blew smoke, musingly, at the ceiling.

Munn found nothing – not a scrap of paper, not a line. This staggered him, but he did not intend that Sprowl should know it.

“Found what you want?” asked Sprowl, comfortably.

“Yes,” replied Munn.

“Belong to the kid?”

“Yes; I’m her guardian.”

The men measured each other in silence for a minute.

“What will you take to keep quiet?” asked Sprowl. “I’ll give you a thousand dollars.”

“I want five thousand,” said Munn, firmly.

“I’ll double it for the papers,” said Sprowl.

Munn waited. “There’s not a paper left,” he said; “O’Hara made me burn ’em.”

“Twenty thousand for the papers,” said Sprowl, calmly.

“My God, Mr. Sprowl!” growled Munn, white and sweating with anguish. “I’d give them to you for half that if I had them. Can’t you believe me? I saw O’Hara burn them.”

“What were you rummaging for, then?” demanded Sprowl.

“For anything – to get a hold on you,” said Munn, sullenly.

“Blackmail?”

Munn was silent.

“Oh,” said Sprowl, lazily. “I think I’ll be going, then – ”

Munn barred his exit, choking with anger.

“You give me five thousand dollars, or I’ll stir ’em up to look into your titles!” he snarled.

Sprowl regarded him with contempt; then another idea struck him, an idea that turned his fat face first to ashes, then to fire.

A month later Sprowl returned to the Sagamore Club, triumphant, good-humored, and exceedingly contented. But he had, he explained, only succeeded in saving the club at the cost of the entire emergency fund – one hundred thousand dollars – which, after all, was a drop in the bucket to the remaining fourteen members.

The victory would have been complete if Sprowl had also been able to purchase the square mile of land lately occupied by O’Hara. But this belonged to O’Hara’s daughter, and the child flatly refused to part with it.

“You’ll have to wait for the little slut to change her mind,” observed Munn to Sprowl. And, as there was nothing else to do, Sprowl and the club waited.

Trouble appeared to be over for the Sagamore Club. Munn disappeared; the daughter was not to be found; the long-coveted land remained tenantless.

Of course, the Sagamore Club encountered the petty difficulties and annoyances to which similar clubs are sooner or later subjected; disputes with neighboring land-owners were gradually adjusted; troubles arising from poachers, dishonest keepers, and night guards had been, and continued to be, settled without harshness or rancor; minks, otters, herons, kingfishers, and other undesirable intruders were kept within limits by the guns of the watchers, although by no means exterminated;

and the wealthy club was steadily but unostentatiously making vast additions to its splendid tracts of forest, hill, and river land.

After a decent interval the Sagamore Club made cautious inquiries concerning the property of the late O'Hara, only to learn that the land had been claimed by Munn, and that taxes were paid on it by that individual.

For fifteen years the O'Hara house remained tenantless; anglers from the club fished freely through the mile of river; the name of Munn had been forgotten save by the club's treasurer, secretary, and president, Peyster Sprowl.

However, the members of the club never forgot that in the centre of their magnificent domain lay a square mile which did not belong to them; and they longed to possess it as better people than they have coveted treasures not laid up on earth.

The relations existing between the members of the Sagamore Club continued harmonious in as far as their social intercourse and the general acquisitive policy of the club was concerned.

There existed, of course, that tacit mutual derision based upon individual sporting methods, individual preferences, obstinate theories concerning the choice of rods, reels, lines, and the killing properties of favorite trout-flies.

Major Brent and Colonel Hyssop continued to nag and sneer at each other all day long, yet they remained as mutually dependent upon each other as David and Jonathan. For thirty years the old gentlemen had angled in company, and gathered inspiration out of the same books, the same surroundings, the same flask.

They were the only guests at the club-house that wet May in 1900, although Peyster Sprowl was expected in June, and young Dr. Lansing had wired that he might arrive any day.

An evening rain-storm was drenching the leaded panes in the smoking-room; Colonel Hyssop drummed accompaniment on the windows and smoked sulkily, looking across the river towards the O'Hara house, just visible through the pelting downpour.

"Irritates me every time I see it," he said.

"Some day," observed Major Brent, comfortably, "I'm going to astonish you all."

"How?" demanded the Colonel, tersely.

The Major examined the end of his cigarette with a cunning smile.

"It isn't for sale, is it?" asked the Colonel. "Don't try to be mysterious; it irritates me."

Major Brent savored his cigarette leisurely.

"Can you keep a secret?" he inquired.

The Colonel intimated profanely that he could.

"Well, then," said the Major, in calm triumph, "there's a tax sale on to-morrow at Foxville."

"Not the O'Hara place?" asked the Colonel, excited.

The Major winked. "I'll fix it," he said, with a patronizing squint at his empty glass.

But he did not "fix it" exactly as he intended; the taxes on the O'Hara place were being paid at that very moment.

He found it out next day, when he drove over to Foxville; he also learned that the Rev. Amasa Munn, Prophet of the Shining Band Community, had paid the taxes and was preparing to quit Maine and re-establish his colony of fanatics on the O'Hara land, in the very centre and heart of the wealthiest and most rigidly exclusive country club in America.

That night the frightened Major telegraphed to Munnville, Maine, an offer to buy the O'Hara place at double its real value. The business-like message ended: "Wire reply at my expense."

The next morning an incoherent reply came by wire, at the Major's expense, refusing to sell, and quoting several passages of Scripture at Western Union rates per word.

The operator at the station counted the words carefully, and collected eight dollars and fourteen cents from the Major, whose fury deprived him of speech.

Colonel Hyssop awaited his comrade at the club-house, nervously pacing the long veranda, gnawing his cigar. "Hello!" he called out, as Major Brent waddled up. "Have you bought the O'Hara place for us?"

The Major made no attempt to reply; he panted violently at the Colonel, then began to run about, taking little, short, distracted steps.

"Made a mess of it?" inquired the Colonel, with a badly concealed sneer.

He eyed the Major in deepening displeasure. "If you get any redder in the face you'll blow up," he said, coldly; "and I don't propose to have you spatter me."

"He – he's an impudent swindler!" hissed the Major, convulsively.

The Colonel sniffed: "I expected it. What of it? After all, there's nobody on the farm to annoy us, is there?"

"Wait!" groaned the Major – "wait!" and he toddled into the hall and fell on a chair, beating space with his pudgy hands.

When the Colonel at length learned the nature of the threatened calamity, he utterly refused to credit it.

"Rubbish!" he said, calmly – "rubbish! my dear fellow; this man Munn is holding out for more money, d'ye see? Rubbish! rubbish! It's blackmail, d'ye see?"

"Do you think so?" faltered the Major, hopefully. "It isn't possible that they mean to come, is it? Fancy all those fanatics shouting about under our windows –"

"Rubbish!" said the Colonel, calmly. "I'll write to the fellow myself."

All through that rainy month of May the two old cronies had the club-house to themselves; they slopped about together, fishing cheek by jowl as they had fished for thirty years; at night they sat late over their toddy, and disputed and bickered and wagged their fingers at each other, and went to bed with the perfect gravity of gentlemen who could hold their own with any toddy ever brewed.

No reply came to the Colonel, but that did not discourage him.

"They are playing a waiting game," he said, sagely. "This man Munn has bought the land from O'Hara's daughter for a song, and he means to bleed us. I'll write to Sprowl; he'll fix things."

Early in June Dr. Lansing and his young kinsman, De Witt Coursay, arrived at the club-house. They, also, were of the opinion that Munn's object was to squeeze the club by threats.

The second week in June, Peyster Sprowl, Master of Fox-hounds, Shadowbrook, appeared with his wife, the celebrated beauty, Agatha Sprowl, *née* Van Guilder.

Sprowl, now immensely large and fat, had few cares in life beyond an anxious apprehension concerning the durability of his own digestion. However, he was still able to make a midnight mouthful of a Welsh rarebit on a hot mince-pie, and wash it down with a quart of champagne, and so the world went very well with him, even if it wobbled a trifle for his handsome wife.

"She's lovely enough," said Colonel Hyssop, gallantly, "to set every star in heaven wabbling." To which the bull-necked Major assented with an ever-hopeless attempt to bend at the waistband.

Meanwhile the Rev. Amasa Munn and his flock, the Shining Band, arrived at Foxville in six farm wagons, singing "Roll, Jordan!"

Of their arrival Sprowl was totally unconscious, the Colonel having forgotten to inform him of the threatened invasion.

II

The members of the Sagamore Club heard the news next morning at a late breakfast. Major Brent, who had been fishing early up-stream, bore the news, and delivered it in an incoherent bellow.

"What d'ye mean by that?" demanded Colonel Hyssop, setting down his cocktail with unsteady fingers.

"Mean?" roared the Major; "I mean that Munn and a lot o' women are sitting on the river-bank and singing 'Home Again!'"

The news jarred everybody, but the effect of it upon the president, Peyster Sprowl, appeared to be out of all proportion to its gravity. That gentleman's face was white as death; and the Major noticed it.

"You'll have to rid us of this mob," said the Major, slowly.

Sprowl lifted his heavy, overfed face from his plate. "I'll attend to it," he said, hoarsely, and swallowed a pint of claret.

"I think it is amusing," said Agatha Sprowl, looking across the table at Coursay.

"Amusing, madam!" burst out the Major. "They'll be doing their laundry in our river next!"

"Soapsuds in my favorite pools!" bawled the Colonel. "Damme if I'll permit it!"

"Sprowl ought to settle them," said Lansing, good-naturedly. "It may cost us a few thousands, but Sprowl will do the work this time as he did it before."

Sprowl choked in his claret, turned a vivid beef-color, and wiped his chin. His appetite was ruined. He hoped the ruin would stop there.

"What harm will they do?" asked Coursay, seriously – "beyond the soapsuds?"

"They'll fish, they'll throw tin cans in the water, they'll keep us awake with their fanatical powwows – confound it, haven't I seen that sort of thing?" said the Major, passionately. "Yes, I have, at nigger camp-meetings! And these people beat the niggers at that sort of thing!"

"Leave 'em to me," repeated Peyster Sprowl, thickly, and began on another chop from force of habit.

"About fifteen years ago," said the Colonel, "there was some talk about our title. You fixed that, didn't you, Sprowl?"

"Yes," said Sprowl, with parched lips.

"Of course," muttered the Major; "it cost us a cool hundred thousand to perfect our title. Thank God it's settled."

Sprowl's immense body turned perfectly cold; he buried his face in his glass and drained it. Then the shrimp-color returned to his neck and ears, and deepened to scarlet. When the earth ceased reeling before his apoplectic eyes, he looked around, furtively. Again the scene in O'Hara's death-chamber came to him; the threat of Munn, who had got wind of the true situation, and the bribing of Munn to silence.

But the club had given Sprowl one hundred thousand dollars to perfect its title; and Sprowl had reported the title perfect, all proceedings ended, and the payment of one hundred thousand dollars to Amasa Munn, as guardian of the child of O'Hara, in full payment for the O'Hara claims to the club property.

Sprowl's coolness began to return. If five thousand dollars had stopped Munn's mouth once, it might stop it again. Besides, how could Munn know that Sprowl had kept for his own uses ninety-five thousand dollars of his club's money, and had founded upon it the House of Sprowl of many millions? He was quite cool now – a trifle anxious to know what Munn meant to ask for, but confident that his millions were a buckler and a shield to the honored name of Sprowl.

"I'll see this fellow, Munn, after breakfast," he said, lighting an expensive cigar.

"I'll go with you," volunteered Lansing, casually, strolling out towards the veranda.

“No, no!” called out Sprowl; “you’ll only hamper me.” But Lansing did not hear him outside in the sunshine.

Agatha Sprowl laid one fair, heavily ringed hand on the table and pushed her chair back. The Major gallantly waddled to withdraw her chair; she rose with a gesture of thanks, and a glance which shot the Major through and through – a wound he never could accustom himself to receive with stoicism.

Mrs. Sprowl turned carelessly away, followed by her two Great Danes – a superb trio, woman and dogs beautifully built and groomed, and expensive enough to please even such an amateur as Peyster Sprowl, M.F.H.

“Gad, Sprowl!” sputtered the Major, “your wife grows handsomer every minute – and you grow fatter.”

Sprowl, midway in a glass of claret, said: “This simple backwoods régime is what she and I need.”

Agatha Sprowl was certainly handsome, but the Major’s eyesight was none of the best. She had not been growing younger; there were lines; also a discreet employment of tints on a very silky skin, which was not quite as fresh as it had once been.

Dr. Lansing, strolling on the veranda with his pipe, met her and her big dogs turning the corner in full sunlight. Coursay was with her, his eager, flushed face close to hers; but he fell back when he saw his kinsman Lansing, and presently retired to the lawn to unreel and dry out a couple of wet silk lines.

Agatha Sprowl sat down on the veranda railing, exchanging a gay smile across the lawn with Coursay; then her dark eyes met Lansing’s steel-gray ones.

“Good-morning, once more,” she said, mockingly.

He returned her greeting, and began to change his mist leader for a white one.

“Will you kindly let Jack Coursay alone?” she said, in a low voice.

“No,” he replied, in the same tone.

“Are you serious?” she asked, as though the idea amused her.

“Of course,” he replied, pleasantly.

“Is it true that you came here because he came?” she inquired, with faint sarcasm in her eyes.

“Yes,” he answered, with perfect good-nature. “You see he’s my own kin; you see I’m the old-fashioned sort – a perfect fool, Mrs. Sprowl.”

There was a silence; he unwound the glistening leader; she flicked at shadows with her dog-whip; the Great Danes yawned and laid their heavy heads against her knees.

“Then you *are* a fool,” she concluded, serenely.

He was young enough to redden.

Three years ago she had thought it time to marry somebody, if she ever intended to marry at all; so she threw over half a dozen young fellows like Coursay, and married Sprowl. For two years her beauty, audacity, and imprudence kept a metropolis and two capitals in food for scandal. And now for a year gossip was coupling her name with Coursay’s.

“I warned you at Palm Beach that I’d stop this,” said Lansing, looking directly into her eyes. “You see, I know his mother.”

“Stop what?” she asked, coolly.

He went on: “Jack is a curiously decent boy; he views his danger without panic, but with considerable surprise. But nobody can tell what he may do. As for me, I’m indifferent, liberal, and reasonable in my views of ... other people’s conduct. But Jack is not one of those ‘other people,’ you see.”

“And *I* am?” she suggested, serenely.

“Exactly; I’m not your keeper.”

“So you confine your attention to Jack and the Decalogue?”

“As for the Commandments,” observed Lansing, “any ass can shatter them with his hind heels, so why should he? If he *must* be an ass, let him be an original ass – not a cur.”

“A cur,” repeated Agatha Sprowl, unsteadily.

“An *affaire de cœur* with a married woman is an affair *do cur*,” said Lansing, calmly – “Gallicize it as you wish, make it smart and fashionable as you can. I told you I was old-fashioned... And I mean it, madam.”

The leader had eluded him; he uncoiled it again; she mechanically took it between her delicate fingers and held it steady while he measured and shortened it by six inches.

“Do you think,” she said, between her teeth, “that it is your mission to padlock me to *that*– in there?”

Lansing turned, following her eyes. She was looking at her husband.

“No,” replied Lansing, serenely; “but I shall see that you don’t transfer the padlock to ... *that*, out *there*” – glancing at Coursay on the lawn.

“Try it,” she breathed, and let go of the leader, which flew up in silvery crinkles, the cast of brightly colored flies dancing in the sunshine.

“Oh, let him alone,” said Lansing, wearily; “all the men in Manhattan are drivelling about you. Let him go; he’s a sorry trophy – and there’s no natural treachery in him; ... it’s not in our blood; ... it’s too cheap for us, and we can’t help saying so when we’re in our right minds.”

There was a little color left in her face when she stood up, her hands resting on the spiked collars of her dogs. “The trouble with you,” she said, smiling adorably, “is your innate delicacy.”

“I know I am brutal,” he said, grimly; “let him alone.”

She gave him a pretty salutation, crossed the lawn, passed her husband, who had just ridden up on a powerful sorrel, and called brightly to Coursay: “Take me fishing, Jack, or I’ll yawn my head off my shoulders.”

Before Lansing could recover his wits the audacious beauty had stepped into the canoe at the edge of the lawn, and young Coursay, eager and radiant, gave a flourish to his paddle, and drove it into the glittering water.

If Sprowl found anything disturbing to his peace of mind in the proceeding, he did not betray it. He sat hunched up on his big sorrel, eyes fixed on the distant clearing, where the white gable-end of O’Hara’s house rose among the trees.

Suddenly he wheeled his mount and galloped off up the river road; the sun glowed on his broad back, and struck fire on his spurs, then horse and rider were gone into the green shadows of the woods.

To play spy was not included in Lansing’s duties as he understood them. He gave one disgusted glance after the canoe, shrugged, set fire to the tobacco in his pipe, and started slowly along the river towards O’Hara’s with a vague idea of lending counsel, aid, and countenance to his president during the expected interview with Munn.

At the turn of the road he met Major Brent and old Peter, the head-keeper. The latter stood polishing the barrels of his shot-gun with a red bandanna; the Major was fuming and wagging his head.

“Doctor!” he called out, when Lansing appeared; “Peter says they raised the devil down at O’Hara’s last night! This can’t go on, d’ye see! No, by Heaven!”

“What were they doing, Peter?” asked Lansing, coming up to where the old man stood.

“Them Shinin’ Banders? Waal, sir, they was kinder rigged out in white night-gounds – robes o’ Jordan they call ’em – an’ they had rubbed some kind o’ shiny stuff – like matches – all over these there night-gounds, an’ then they sang a spell, an’ then they all sot down on the edge o’ the river.”

“Is that all?” asked Lansing, laughing.

“Wait!” growled the Major.

“Waal,” continued old Peter, “the shinin’ stuff on them night-gounds was that bright that I seen the fishes swimmin’ round kinder dazed like. ‘Gosh!’ sez I to m’self, it’s like a Jack a-drawnin’ them trout – yaas’r. So I hollers out, ‘Here! You Shinin’ Band folk, you air a-drawnin’ the trout. Quit it!’ sez

I, ha'sh an' pert-like. Then that there Munn, the Prophet, he up an' hollers, 'Hark how the heathen rage!' he hollers. An' with that, blamed if he didn't sling a big net into the river, an' all them Shinin' Banders ketched holt an' they drawed it clean up-stream. 'Quit that!' I hollers, 'it's agin the game laws!' But the Prophet he hollers back, 'Hark how the heathen rage!' Then they drawed that there net out, an' it were full o' trout, big an' little – ”

“Great Heaven!” roared the Major, black in the face.

“I think,” said Lansing, quietly, “that I'll walk down to O'Hara's and reason with our friend Munn. Sprowl may want a man to help him in this matter.”

III

When Sprowl galloped his sorrel mare across the bridge and up to the O'Hara house, he saw a man and a young girl seated on the grass of the river-bank, under the shade of an enormous elm.

Sprowl dismounted heavily, and led his horse towards the couple under the elm. He recognized Munn in the thin, long-haired, full-bearded man who rose to face him; and he dropped the bridle from his hand, freeing the sorrel mare.

The two men regarded each other in silence; the mare strayed leisurely up-stream, cropping the fresh grass; the young girl turned her head towards Sprowl with a curious movement, as though listening, rather than looking.

"Mr. Munn, I believe," said Sprowl, in a low voice.

"The Reverend Amasa Munn," corrected the Prophet, quietly. "You are Peyster Sprowl."

Sprowl turned and looked full at the girl on the grass. The shadow of her big straw hat fell across her eyes; she faced him intently.

Sprowl glanced at his mare, whistled, and turned squarely on his heel, walking slowly along the river-bank. The sorrel followed like a dog; presently Munn stood up and deliberately stalked off after Sprowl, rejoining that gentleman a few rods down the river-bank.

"Well," said Sprowl, turning suddenly on Munn, "what are you doing here?"

From his lank height Munn's eyes were nevertheless scarcely level with the eyes of the burly president.

"I'm here," said Munn, "to sell the land."

"I thought so," said Sprowl, curtly. "How much?"

Munn picked a buttercup and bit off the stem. With the blossom between his teeth he surveyed the sky, the river, the forest, and then the features of Sprowl.

"How much?" asked Sprowl, impatiently.

Munn named a sum that staggered Sprowl, but Munn could perceive no tremor in the fat, blank face before him.

"And if we refuse?" suggested Sprowl.

Munn only looked at him.

Sprowl repeated the question.

"Well," observed Munn, stroking his beard reflectively, "there's that matter of the title."

This time Sprowl went white to his fat ears. Munn merely glanced at him, then looked at the river.

"I will buy the title this time," said Sprowl, hoarsely.

"You can't," said Munn.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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